

Contribution of the *Ruhunu Kataragama Dewalaya* for the 1818 Kandyan Uprising

Hasitha Chamikara Gunasinghe¹

Located in Southern Sri Lanka, *Kataragama Dewalaya* is believed to be holy because the renowned deity who is associated with it, known as *Kataragama Deviyo*. According to Hindu chronicles he is known for God of war, because the defeating his enemies and being victorious in battles. *Kataragama Deviyo* was venerated by Sri Lankan kings throughout the history. Kings such as Dutugamunu (161-137 BC) who ruled in the kingdom of Anuradhapura, had sought blessing from the *Kataragama Deviyo* before initiating his military conquests. In addition kings in the kingdom of Kandy, too had sought blessings from the *Kataragama Deviyo*. This historic narrative developed in the context of 1818 Kandyan Uprising against the British rule. In order to understand the contribution of the *Ruhunu Kataragama Dewalaya*, in shaping the 1818 Kandyan Uprising, literally sources were examined for this analysis. Before the 1818 Uprising began, Wilbawe the claimant for throne went on a pilgrimage to *Kataragama* as a Buddhist monk to seek blessings from the deity. When Wilbawe left the dewalaya, he took a sacred ornament from the dewalaya and a garment which had the portrait of the *Kataragama Deviyo*. It is said that he constantly venerated the sacred objects and the portrait he took from the shrine and made devotional offering to the deity. Even the *Kapurallas* and *Bethmerala* who were in charges of the dewalaya, blessed and supported to this uprising against the British. The general public too gave their support to the uprising, given the fact that Wilbawe had sought the blessing from the victorious *Kataragama Deviyo*. Thus, conclusively, *Katargama Deviyo* and *Ruhunu Kataragama Dewalaya* played a vital role in shaping 1818 Uprising against the British.

Keywords: *1818 Kandyan Uprising, Kataragama Deviyo, Ruhunu Kataragama Dewalaya, British Rule in Ceylon*

¹ Department of History, University of Kelaniya
hachagu@gmail.com